

## Diligence In The Face Of Trials

The Assurance of Salvation

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We are at war! I am not talking about the physical conflicts between nations today, but you and I are in a fight for our lives—not just our physical lives but our eternal lives. Our mental condition with respect to courage, confidence, enthusiasm, and willingness to endure hardship determines how effectively we triumph over Satan, the world, and our own human nature. It affects our effectiveness in overcoming sin. It determines our diligence in the face of trials. It impacts how well we fight our spiritual battles. It even affects the morale of the church.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that we are to "be strong." He also tells us the way that we are to be strong. However, this is not to be confused with the world's version of being strong. Their strength is in their own self-confidence, which is a weakening and fading strength without a real foundation.

**Ephesians 6:10** Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

How can we "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might"? Paul does not tell us to do nothing. Quite the contrary, he tells us to exert ourselves with all our might; but the power given to us to do so is God's and from Him and we must learn increasingly how to rely upon that power and to build upon it in our own lives. These two things must always be taken together. It is not that we do nothing and He does everything or that we do everything and only ask for a little help and encouragement. It is neither of these alternatives. It is a perfect blending of His power and our activity. It is our activity in and through the power that He gives us.

Let us look at a number of scriptures that prove this unity of our activity and His power. There are certain terms used in the scriptures that show the perfect blending of the two and how the two come together.

In this second chapter to the Hebrews, Paul explains how, because Jesus was to be the Captain of our salvation, He took to Himself human nature. Because the children are of flesh and blood, "He Himself likewise shared in the same."

**Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom

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are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Here the apostle Paul uses one of the great titles of Jesus. He calls him the Captain, the Author, the Founder, or the Pioneer (from the original Greek word *archegos*). The same word is used of Jesus in Hebrews 12:2. At its simplest, it means "head" or "chief," as a general is the head of his army. It can mean "founder" or "originator," as is used of the founder of a city or of a family. It can be used in the sense of source or origin; thus, a good governor is said to be the *archegos* of peace, and a bad governor, the *archegos* of confusion.

One basic idea clings to the word in all its uses. An *archegos* is one who begins something in order that others may enter into it. He begins a family that someday others may be born into it. He founds a city in order that others may someday dwell in it. *Archegos* is one who blazes a trail for others to follow.

William Barclay uses this analogy to illustrate the word *archegos*: "Suppose a ship is on the rocks and the only way to rescue is for someone to swim ashore with a line in order that, once the line is secured, others might follow. The one who is first to swim ashore will be the *archegos* of the safety of the others."

This is what Paul means when he says that Jesus is "the *archegos* of our salvation." Jesus has blazed the trail to God for us to follow. How was He able to become the *archegos* of salvation?

The verb translated *make perfect* in verse 10 is *teleioun*, which comes from the adjective *teleios*, which is usually translated *perfect*. However, in the New Testament *teleios* has a very special meaning. It has nothing to do with abstract and metaphysical and philosophic perfection. It is used, for example, of an animal that is unblemished and fit to be offered as a sacrifice. It is used of a scholar who is no longer at the elementary stage but mature. It is used of a human being or an animal that is full grown. It is used of a Christian who is baptized. The basic meaning of *teleios* in the New Testament is always that the thing or person described in this way fully carries out the purpose for which it is designed. Therefore, the verb *teleioun* will mean not so much "to make perfect" as "to make fully adequate for the task for which designed."

What Paul is saying, then, is that through suffering, Jesus was made fully able for the task of being the Captain, the Author, the Pioneer of our salvation. Why was this so important? It was through His sufferings that He was really identified with human beings.

Paul quotes three Old Testament texts as forecasts of this identity with mankind: Psalm 22:22; Isaiah 8:17; and Isaiah 8:18.

**Hebrews 2:11-13** For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."

If Jesus had come into the world in a form in which He could never have suffered, He would have been very different from men and would be able to neither identify with them nor lead the way as the Captain, Author, or Pioneer of our salvation. Through His sufferings, Jesus Christ identified Himself with mankind. Through this identity, Christ sympathizes with human beings. He literally feels with us. It is almost impossible to understand another person's sorrows and sufferings unless we have been through them. We have a hard time sympathizing or empathizing with someone if we have not walked a mile in his shoes or had the operation that he has had.

Today many people suffer from anxiety. A person without a trace of nerves has no conception of the tortures of nervousness. A person who is perfectly physically fit has no conception of the weariness of the person who is easily tired or the pain of a person who is never free from pain. A person who suffers from incapacitating headaches cannot comprehend the resulting cloudiness of mind and distraction of pain. A person who learns easily often cannot understand why someone who is slow finds things so difficult. A person who has never sorrowed cannot understand the pain at the heart of the person into whose life grief has come. A person who has never loved can never understand either the sudden glory or the aching loneliness in the lover's heart. We see that the world stands in that lacking of love and never being able to understand the glory of loving God.

Before we can have sympathy, we have to go through the same things through which the other person has gone—and that is precisely what Jesus did. Because He sympathizes, Jesus can really help in the best way possible. He has met our sorrows; He has faced our temptations. As a result He knows exactly what help we need, and He can give it. "He Himself has suffered, being tempted, [and] He is able to aid those who are tempted."

**Hebrews 2:14-18** Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might

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destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

The word *aid* is stated three times. In the King James Version, it is *succor*, and in the English Standard Version, it is *help*. All of them give the right meaning of the word. Jesus was not only ready to suffer, but He actually did suffer. Having come as a man and in the likeness of sinful flesh, He was Himself subject to temptations. The reason for this is given: "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." He can identify with us and give us exactly the help that we need.

He does not take the battle from us, and He does not tell us to hand it all over to Him. Because He has been through it, He will fight our battles for us. He does give aid to the seed of Abraham, the members of the Church of God and is able to aid us when we are tempted. Simply put, He helps us but does not take it completely out of our hands so that we do nothing but "abide" and reap the fruits of His victory; we are required to do our part.

On the contrary, He—having gone through all of this experience, having been made perfect in His suffering, and having learned obedience through that which He suffered—is now in the position in which He can truly aid us in the best possible way. He can help us because He has gone through it, suffering as a human being suffers.

He can sustain, can hold us who are still being tempted. The word *aid* is enough in and of itself to show the true explanation of the text that we are considering. There the two come together. We are involved in this fight with Satan, and Christ comes and aids us because of what He Himself has experienced. He knows exactly what we are feeling and what it feels like to have Satan try to influence us.

His sufferings were a part of His preparation for this work. He has been appointed to be a faithful high priest, not only in representing us to God, but also in helping us here on earth. Thus, we are told that He aids us but not that He does it all instead of us. We do not hand it over; we fight and He aids us. He comes to our aid as we fight.

The apostle Paul makes a similar statement in Romans 8:

**Romans 8:26-27** Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit [itself] makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Paul tells us that Christ, a Holy Spirit, does not take the problem from us because we are sick; but Christ, a Holy Spirit, helps our infirmities. He does not take it all from us; we do not hand it all over; we do not sit silent while Christ prays for us. No, He helps; He comes to our aid. We are required to do the works part of faith.

The term used pictures us as trying to carry a heavy log or a plank and staggering beneath it, but this Holy Spirit comes and takes up the other end and together we carry it forward. He helps. We do not cease to carry; He carries the burden with us. He comes to our aid and gives us a helping hand.

Take another example from II Corinthians 12, where the apostle Paul is describing his experience in vision.

**II Corinthians 12:7-9** And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

So that his focus would not be on himself and what he was accomplishing, Paul received this affliction, apparently for the remainder of his life, which helped to keep him in a humble state. He prayed three times, asking God to take this burden away, but the reply that he received was this: "My grace, the grace that I will give you, will be sufficient for you to do this work you have to do, even though the thorn in the flesh still remains."

The thorn was not taken out of him—he still had to struggle with it—but he was given grace, and that grace was sufficient. Paul said, "For My strength is made perfect in weakness. As we go through trials, afflictions, and sufferings, we should always keep in mind that God may not heal us of this affliction or sickness. However, we still have to go on and use it to benefit God, partly by keeping ourselves in a humble attitude and partly

by realizing that we deeply need God to help us through life, through the sufferings and the trials.

God's grace is the dynamic of salvation. Grace expresses more than gifts given by God. It is present in the forgiveness of sin; but far more than that, it is essential to the entire process of salvation. Grace gives to the called of God whatever is necessary to enable us to succeed for God's purpose. Grace gives us help: it helps us in time of need; it helps us to have humility; and it helps us to serve others.

**Hebrews 4:16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Romans 12:3** For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

**I Peter 4:10** As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

God gives us grace so that we may continue to fellowship with Him and to serve His people. As an enabler for salvation to be possible, grace's foundation and source are in God. It is the single most important aspect of our spiritual and eternal salvation. Grace is a gift in the sense that God's giving of it is completely and totally unearned and unmerited, but it is not simply a gift. Even though God's grace is the foundation for good works, the good works by themselves do not and cannot earn us grace. Christ's strength and our weakness come together. We still have to go on in our weakness, but His grace and His strength are sufficient.

The last half of II Corinthians 12:9 says, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Because the power of Christ rests upon us, we are enabled to continue. This is how His grace is sufficient.

**II Corinthians 12:10** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This should give us great encouragement and great strength to go on while we are in afflictions, infirmities, sickness, and when our bodies are ailing us. It sounds

paradoxical—"when I am weak, then I am strong"—but it is true. We still have to go on in our weakness, doing all He is calling us to do; but He enables us to continue with our work.

Philippians 2 is, in many ways, a key to this principle. It is a blending of the two aspects about which I have been talking.

**Philippians 2:12-13** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Paul's exhortation here contradicts the "let go and let God do it" philosophy. Here in verses 12 and 13, the two sides are brought together. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and it is an extremely difficult duty for us to do. We have to be careful and prepared. It involves "fear and trembling," which is so different from the theory which says, "Let God do it all for us." Who is sufficient for these things? Who can do this? The answer is, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do." The two things come together and are not separate in the false way that many in mainstream Christianity believe.

Let us continue by looking at other statements in which the apostle Paul tells us about himself and the way in which he lived God's way of life.

**Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

To many people, the apostle Paul seems to be contradicting each statement he makes. However, what he is doing is showing both sides of this principle that answers who is working. He uses this method of writing to make us think about these things and to save us from the spirit of error.

He says, "I have been crucified with Christ." What does that mean? To those who believe the wrong teaching, that means that Paul ceased doing anything—he handed it all over; he finished his life of struggle and endeavor. Does not Paul also go on to say, "It is no longer I...but Christ lives in me"? Because of this, we find in mainstream Christianity that it is an *la carte* religion, in which many will pick this phrase out from

this scripture and that phrase out from that scripture. They end up with a partial, incorrect, and false set of doctrinal beliefs.

We cannot fall short of a complete understanding of this statement. It seems to say only that—"I am no longer doing anything"—but that is not the whole story. Paul continues, "and in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." We are living this life in terms of our faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ and what they have done for us and what they will yet do. Paul does not leave out either side. If we say we have to do it all ourselves, we are wrong; if we say that we do nothing and Christ does it all for us, we are equally wrong. We live in the flesh and Christ lives in us, thereby enabling us to live this life in the flesh.

In the latter part of his letter to the Philippians, Paul thanked them for the gift that they had sent to him while he was in prison.

**Philippians 4:11-13** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

We are very familiar with this passage. Paul says that he can do all things, but he is able to do all things only through Christ who strengthens him. Christ is strengthening him, infusing power into him—but it is Paul who does all things. It is he who knows both how to be abased and how to abound.

Paul did not hand it all over and become a sitting spectator, passively "abiding." He was involved; he was the one who was doing all these things. However, the glory of it is that he was able to do all these things through Christ. Christ did not do it all for him but strengthened him with His power. The tasks were not taken out of his hands, but he was enabled to do them because he was being strengthened in this way. We can apply this to every last aspect of our lives.

Let us take a moment to look at some of the apostle Paul's personal experiences that illustrate this principle in a somewhat more objective way. Paul endured some very trying experiences, some of which are recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

**Acts 18:9-10** Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will

attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."

Paul was being threatened, but verses 9 and 10 record God's assurance of help. This is how His gift of strength works. Paul was made strong by the vision and assurance that were given to him. He still had to go on with his preaching, but he was assured in this special way that he was not left to himself and that God would be with him to strengthen him. God was talking to one of His ministers, one of His children in the church; thus, so this promise is also extended to us when God has certain things for us to do.

There is a similar example in Acts 23 with regard to a plot by the Jerusalem Jews against Paul. Paul told the council that his conscience was clear before God, for which the high priest Ananias wanted him slapped. I am sure that slap was not just a lace hankie slap; it was probably almost a sock. Paul called Ananias a hypocrite for judging him and at the same time breaking Jewish law by illegally commanding him to be struck on the mouth. However, Paul had not known that Ananias was the high priest.

Then Paul realized that there were both Pharisees and Sadducees there. Knowing that one group believed in the resurrection of the dead and the other did not, Paul shifted the focus off himself and onto the issue of the hope of the resurrection. This caused such uproar between the two factions that the commander feared that they would pull Paul to pieces, and he had Paul forcibly removed from the inquisition and taken to the barracks.

**Acts 23:11-13** But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.

Because Christ manifested Himself to him and spoke to him, he was filled with strength to continue his testimony. Having this assurance, he was able to do so and will do it the more confidently in the strength of this great power. We are enabled to do whatever God has us to do, whether it be to serve the brethren from day to day or to weather through afflictions, sorrows, and trials.

There is also that very dramatic story in Acts 27 in connection with the shipwreck of Paul and his companions on the way to Rome. Notice especially verses 23 through 25. The situation was becoming quite desperate; they had even thrown the tackle of the

ship overboard.

**Acts 27:20-25** Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me."

He must have felt such a confidence at that point when they were all losing their sanity, and Paul was quite calm. The real thing is in many ways more exciting than the way that they portray some of these biblical stories in movies. How was he able to speak with confidence? There they all were, at their wits' end: the captain, the sailors, and everyone else completely distraught and desperate; shipwreck expected any moment. The end, disaster, and loss of life was probably all of which they could think. What was Paul able to say with confidence? "Take heart, men." The King James Version and many other versions translate his words as, "Be of good cheer!" The Amplified version says, "Keep up your courage, men." What enables him to overcome these circumstances in this way?

Then they proceed to do certain things themselves. They do not just let the ship drift; they attend to many necessary things. Paul was made strong by the word that was given to him, and he, in turn, was able to make his fellow voyagers strong by passing on this assurance to them. In a sense, this is what I am trying to do here, in going through these scriptures: to pass on the assurance and the confidence that developing this sermon has given to me. I have preached on some of these things before, but this is a slightly different aspect.

They had given up hope, and they were desperate; but as Paul's words from God gave them assurance, they became capable of dealing with the situation. One of the things that we see here is that, as individual members of God's church, we can do so much. We can do so much in the way of encouragement and in building assurance and confidence in an individual in the church who is going through a trial or a sickness or is facing an operation of some type.

Let us look at yet another example from Paul's experience. Writing in his second epistle to Timothy, Paul mentions his "first answer," by which he refers to his first defense at his trial. The legal procedure then was very similar to the way it is now. The case would be started, and then there would be an adjournment, then another appearance, and so on. This is what Paul was facing.

**II Timothy 4:16-17** At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

Notice the sequence of events, always in the same order: God strengthens us. He does not take the problem out of our hands so that we do nothing. Paul's assurance came from the knowledge that, in his words, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me." Jesus Christ makes us powerful, mighty, strong, and capable of fighting and wrestling. He does not take the action out of our hands. God is developing powerful spiritual human beings for His Kingdom, for His Family. He does not want a bunch of people with their feet up on a hassock somewhere, waiting for Him to do it all.

How does He stand by us? How does He strengthen us? Jesus Christ is in us by the indwelling of His Spirit. "He who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (I John 3:24).

Some of the most significant words in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ describe the efforts of the saints when they are attacked by the enemy, the old dragon, the serpent, the devil.

**Revelation 12:11** "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

The saints overcame Satan; he was not overcome *for* them. This is very significant. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death—very concisely and plainly put.

How do the saints overcome the devil "by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony"? Simply stated, they put into practice the apostle James' exhortation: "Resist

the devil, and he will flee from you." They do not just sit back and let Christ overcome Satan for them.

We hold on and we fight. We are enabled to conquer Satan, to overcome him, to be more than conquerors over him. We are to resist him, and he will flee from us as long as we do so in this right way. The right way according to James is to first submit to God: "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." That sounds like a lot of work that a Christian has to do. You know that submitting to God means keeping the Ten Commandments and the statutes and also producing the fruit of the Spirit.

It is clear then, that, we are involved. Your actions and mine must continue; our efforts must increase—and Christ will enable us more and more. Now here comes the practical question:

How does all of this actually work in practice? What exactly are we to do?

We have to realize, understand, and actively apply that to which the assurance relates. If you and I are to wrestle triumphantly against Satan and all his powers, the first essential is assurance of salvation. There is no hope for us in this conflict unless we know God's power and God's might. Faith is a foundational element and gift that we are both given and have to develop.

In other words, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." We cannot give a good testimony about someone if we do not know where we stand with regard to our relationship with him. It is only the one who is certain who can give a good testimony and who can act as a true witness.

God witnesses to the saints through His Spirit about His assurance of salvation. Paul wrote in Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." The saints' testimony in the book of Revelation is that the blood was on them, that they belonged to Christ. They possessed assurance of salvation. By assurance we are made strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. How does this work?

Ezra was a man who had to face very great difficulties. He had to face the problem of reconstruction after the destruction of Jerusalem, after the sacking of the city and the carrying away of the people. Everything was a mass of ruins—complete chaos. Here was a man facing a tremendous task with enemies attacking all around.

Now Ezra makes one of the most profound remarks, from the practical standpoint, in the whole of scripture. He says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." This is so foundational and so important.

**Nehemiah 8:9-10** And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Put in a negative way, Ezra, in effect, was saying, "While you are miserable, unhappy, and uncertain, you will never succeed and will be totally defeated." That is how important it was to recognize that the joy of the Lord was their strength.

There is no limit to the number of examples by which this can be illustrated. In fact, we all know this by experience. We wake up one morning and find ourselves feeling unhappy and miserable.

Then we have an inkling of the type of day we think we will have. We have an ominous feeling that nothing is going to go right today. I should add here that, most of the time, morning prayer with God will change the course the day seems to be taking. However, assuming we have not prayed that morning, we go through the day with an oppressive mental blanket over us. The day-to-day work we do will be difficult, full of problems. We begin to wonder whether we are up to the challenge, whether we should go away for a while and just let things pass by. The anxiety just keeps wearing us down.

However, when we are happy, our work gives no trouble, or little trouble that is noticed. We just run through it. Everybody knows this experience. Our personal condition will determine the way that we do our work. A man who has domestic troubles leaves his home having had an argument or a quarrel over certain problems. How can he face his work in his job with joy? He cannot. He is already defeated. If, though, he begins his day with prayer, in strengthening his relationship with God, and if everything is well and happy at home, most things are well at work. This is obvious to everyone.

Ezra says, "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." That joy is a realization and an understanding that we have—an assurance from God of our salvation and an assurance that He gives us the power that we need to make it through whatever

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comes our way. There is nothing to compare with happiness. If we are happy and all is well, we will go through our work easily; its challenges will be overcome. The "joy of the Lord" puts strength into us, puts power into us. Additionally, as we near the end of this age, this assurance of salvation will be so essential that no one will survive without it. Anxiety, at the very least, will eat them alive

**Matthew 24:24** "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

How is it possible for assurance to energize a person when the problem is still there? We are human beings, not machines. A person is a complex amalgam. We have the same nerves, the same muscles, the same brain—we are always the same throughout. However, that is not a complete description of a human being.

There is a kind of electricity in a person, as well. We cannot measure it perfectly and we only know a limited amount about it, but it is there. Suddenly, when this electricity is generated, it charges everything else and we are twice the person we were before.

From a strictly physical point of view, we are the same person; but in practice, we are not the same person at all. We are much stronger; everything is keyed up; we are energized. We are ready for anything, and we can do things that we could not possibly have done when we were miserable and doubtful. That is the physical surge that we get from even just having a positive attitude. How much more power do we get having the Spirit of God active in us?

This is seen in all levels and types of sports, especially team sports such as football and basketball. When a team loses heart, it loses the game. This is one of the reasons why schools and universities have pep rallies. I am sure many of you have been to one in high school. You go to a pep rally, and it just energizes everybody. It energizes the fans; it energizes the players; and the students run out of the auditorium ready to conquer Mount Everest in just a t-shirt. It is that emotional lift and rise that people get. Often, this energizing effect can be maintained throughout most of the game. However, in our spiritual battle, we need this energy all the way to the end of our lives; and the only source of this energy is God's Holy Spirit. That is the very thing that the apostle Paul is emphasizing in Ephesians 6:10: "My brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." It is also what Ezra is saying in Nehemiah 8:10: "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

We have to be spiritually energized! When we work to make our calling and election

sure, we become energized with the Holy Spirit. That is, the more that we make our calling and election sure, the more energy, strength, and power we receive through the Holy Spirit. The person that just kicks back and lets Christ do it is the person who has no energy. If he does, it is just the emotional physical energy that you get from a pep rally. That is a major difference between the churches of the world—who come out of church hooraying and hurraing and having an emotional lift—compared to us. Ours is much longer than theirs; theirs is but for a moment and is passing.

There is an interesting prophecy in Daniel that contains a principle that applies to the energizing of God's people until the time of the end. Notice that Daniel shows how God may limit His aid to His people to work out His purpose:

**Daniel 11:29-35** "At the appointed time he shall return and go toward the south; but it shall not be like the former or the latter. For ships from Cyprus shall come against him; therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage. So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation. Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering. Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue. And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time."

In a sense, this is a general prophecy to God's church as to what would happen to some in the church. This would happen to refine them, purify them, and make them white. He says there that the aid that He would give at times would be a little aid. We confidently have to know that it would be sufficient if we are faced with martyrdom. It was the principle there that I wanted to pull out, not the prophecy itself.

They are not called upon to fold their arms and to look on while the exploits are done for them. The essential factor in the situation is that the people know their God. The people who know their God are incapable of being seduced to apostasy and sin. For some in God's church, that means that their witnessing may be that of martyrdom. We can be thankful that do not know who and we do not know how many; it is sometimes best not

to know the future. It is the knowledge of God and all that that means that makes us strong. It infuses power into us; it keys us up; and it makes us capable.

It is not passivity that makes us strong—quite the opposite! This idea that the Christian just does nothing and sits back passively while all is done is the very antithesis of the biblical teaching that the Christian is charged with power and feels that there is nothing he cannot do when he is "strong in the Lord." It depends on the fact that he knows God and has a personal relationship with Him. He is able to stand steadfast; he is afraid of nothing; and he can make the most of any situation. Thus we see faith described. To truly know God, we have to think as He thinks and live as He lives. This requires a great amount of effort: faith, repentance, obedience, and overcoming. We have to believe and understand the assurances that God has promised, or we are already defeated. Notice another statement about this same thing by the apostle Paul.

**Acts 20:22-23** "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me."

Here we see Paul in a situation that could not be much worse. Satan and all of his forces are arrayed against him, using communities and individuals, Jews and Romans alike, to provide the bonds of affliction for the apostle. The Holy Spirit is witnessing this to him in every city. Wherever he goes, someone or other prophesies to this effect. However, listen to what he says next:

**Acts 20:24** "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul says, "None of these things move me." He is not frightened. He is not intimidated, despite the warnings of trouble. His only complaint is against his friends who were weeping and pleading with him not to go. All Paul wants to do is to finish his race with joy. He rejoiced in his ministry. His joy was in God. He rejoiced in the fact that he, who had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an injurious person, was now an evangelist, an apostle of Christ. His joy in this was so great that although he knew what was coming, he could still say, "None of these things move me." He is more than a conqueror; he has overcome them. It is his joy in the ministry that lifts him up above all his difficult circumstances and enables him to overcome and triumph.

All of this drives us to the conclusion that if we are in any kind of doubt or uncertainty with regard to our salvation, Satan has already defeated us. We must be assured of our salvation. The inspired written word of God emphasizes this constantly; much of it is devoted to teaching that brings us certainty and assurance. If Satan has us down, he is cutting off the source of supply, the source of energy, of power, of life. It is a very scary thought is that if he has already defeated us with regard to our assurance of salvation, obviously he aims to defeat us everywhere else, as well. There again, it gets back to faith. Faith is so foundationally important.

In this miserable, unhappy state Satan will come at us and tempt us, in the flesh or the spirit or any other way that he can. He has an easy time defeating us in other areas of our lives when he has defeated us in the assurance of salvation. When we are already down in the spirit, Satan will kick us all the more while we lie there. If that is your case, there is only one way of recovery: you must get up and get assurance and an absolute certainty with regard to your salvation. That is what will give backbone to you; and as a result, the Holy Spirit will supply you with strength and power.

As Christians, we have to realize who we are and what we are. We have to work very hard to have that intimate relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, and that is done primarily through worship and prayer. The mere realization of the fact that we are children of God is one of the greatest sources of encouragement and joy we can have.

Let me give two illustrations of this, one in Ezra and the other in Nehemiah. Ezra had asked the king for a certain number of people and provisions to go back to Jerusalem to start the work of reconstruction. They arrived at a critical point, and Ezra hesitated for a moment. He realized the difficulties—how there were enemies waiting and ready to attack—and his first instinct was to send a messenger to the king in Babylon and ask him for an escort of soldiers to accompany them and defend them and safeguard them from attack of the enemy. You have already guessed Whom he forgot.

He suddenly said to himself, "I cannot do that." Instead of sending a messenger to the king to ask for an escort of soldiers, he said, "I proclaim a fast...for I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers." Why was he ashamed?

**Ezra 8:21-22** Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath

are against all those who forsake Him."

Ezra had said to the king, "Our God will protect us," and then in hypocrisy, he nearly turned around and asked the king for help. That was his sin and that is what he caught himself from doing. He had been on the verge of sending the message asking for a military escort and so on, but suddenly he said, "I cannot do that, because of what I have already said to the king about the power of my God." He had told the king that they were going on a dangerous trip, to which the king replied, "Do you think that is wise?" Ezra basically responded, "It will be all right." Then the king inquired, "What if the enemies attack you?" Ezra countered, "All will be well."

Ezra had said to the pagan king, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him.... We are children of God, and our God is almighty." Ezra was human, though; and when a temporary feeling of fear arose later, he almost gave in. It sounds like something through which we all go, at times.

However, then he said, "I cannot ask for soldiers. I am one of God's people and have told the king so and have claimed great things in the name of God." Ezra told the men that they would not ask for troops, that they would call for a fast instead and get back into contact with God before setting out. Here is another tool to use in addition to prayer if you are not sure of your assurance of salvation from God: fasting. We humbly come before God and ask Him to show us the right way. The knowledge of the assurance that God would save him made Ezra strong. He was no longer a defeatist, and he triumphantly went forward on his way.

The second illustration involves Nehemiah. He recognized who he was and that he had protection. A critical moment had come in the reconstruction work in Jerusalem. They had started building the wall, but there were enemies looking on and jeering at them and threatening to come in to destroy it all. They had to work with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, and there was a constant watch day and night. The situation was very desperate. Then a supposed friend of Nehemiah came to him and tried to pressure him to take some measures to protect himself since he was the leader.

**Nehemiah 6:10-13** Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then

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I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

What saved Nehemiah was that he knew who and what he was with respect to God. "Should such a man as I flee?" Was he just a great egotist, guilty of overestimating his worth? No! He acknowledged that it would be a sin to be afraid. Fear is a lack of love for God; it is faithlessness. As soon as he remembered who he was, he was assured of salvation. That is, as soon as he straightened out his mental attitude, God gave him discernment and assurance. Thus, it appears from what we have seen so far that without faith we cannot have that assurance in God; and, therefore, where is the power that comes from having that assurance in God?

The advice he received from Shemaiah is not characteristic of God, is not consistent with God's way. Nehemiah recognized this. He remembered who he was: God's servant. "Should such a man as I flee?" The moment he stood on that essential fact that he was a man of God, it was given to him to see that God had never sent this messenger at all but Tobiah and Sanballat, his enemies, who by a ruse and subterfuge had engaged a man to act as traitor in order to defeat Nehemiah.

Nehemiah got his victory, lost his fear, and was "more than a conqueror." Why? Simply because of the knowledge of the fact that he was a man of God. That is the beginning of "being strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." In other words, he had faith.

As we realize and truly understand who and what we are, we are already far on the way to certain victory over Satan, the world, and our own human nature. If we are children of God, then God has given us the assurance of salvation. Knowing this fact is faith. Faith is an active belief; it is knowing God that exists and the dynamically trusting in His Word, Jesus Christ. We have to get off our own tail ends and work with God to make our own "call and election sure."

**III Peter 1:10-11** Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The word *make* in verse 10 is in the middle voice grammatically, and thus implies "to

make for oneself." In other words, it is to make it happen starting with our positive and active response to God's call. Many are called, but few are chosen. What is the difference between those who are called and those who are chosen? Effort, diligence, perseverance, overcoming!

The original word for *sure* in verse 10 is used of confirming something, as in the legal terminology of validating a will. A Christian, by growing in grace, becomes assured of having been called and chosen—that is, elected by God. Peter's emphasis is on our response. We have to respond in faith to God's gracious working. Peter has already told us what our response should be. He has already written, in verse 5, that we are to make every effort as Christians. In eight areas, Peter gives us overall principles in which growth is required:

**II Peter 1: 5-9** But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Peter shows in his list of Christian virtues that not even affection for the brethren is enough. We must have a love as deeply committed as the love of God that motivated Him to sacrifice His Son to prepare the way for our salvation. It is our responsibility to be true witnesses to all mankind of the love that God has shown to us. This means that the fruit of love must be seen in our everyday lives, because that is how we witness.

God is not looking for partial commitment. He is not hoping that we will occasionally come to worship Him when we feel like it. He does not say, "Thank you so much for coming to worship me."

Peter's serious concern is that we take the responsibility to continue to the ends of our lives to be more deeply grounded within the same hope that Jesus and the apostles displayed. Now we must "be even more diligent." We have to be all the more eager to make our call and election sure. The acid test of the genuineness of our faith is that either we make costly life changes or we treat overcoming sin and the judgment to follow as irrelevant to our call and election.

The wonderful truth is that God has called us into His church to prepare for eternal life.

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This is not a mere abstract matter of philosophy in which there is no need of any response apart from intellectual acknowledgement. Rather, the evidence that we have been called and chosen is the energy, the effort that we put into making our call and election sure in order to be able to say, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me."